

SUPPORTING ASEAN BUSINESS RECOVERY



The United States is providing small and medium enterprises in Southeast Asia with the skills and tools needed to adapt and thrive following the COVID-19 pandemic. The transformation of the existing ASEAN SME Academy will unlock enterprise-led economic growth and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

Small (including micro), and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent more than 97% of firms and between 60-80% of total employment across Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Equipping SMEs for a strong recovery is critical to economic stability paving the way for a more peaceful, secure region.

THE ASEAN SME ACADEMY

The United States has long recognized that supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME), as the backbone of ASEAN country economies, can help build nations that are more resilient and prosperous. In 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US-ASEAN Business Council (US-ABC) launched the US-ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive Small and Medium Enterprises (Business Alliance). This innovative public-private partnership, trained over 4,000 SME owners utilizing the world-class expertise offered by US-ABC corporate members. In 2016, to reach more SMEs, the Business Alliance launched an online training platform called the ASEAN SME Academy that provides free, centralized, online access to global, regional, and country-specific training resources and support for ASEAN SMEs by enhancing their business and digital skills. In 2018, the SME Academy was handed over to the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises with support from the Philippines Department of Trade and Industry, Philippines Trade and Training Centre, and the US-ASEAN Business Council.



The ASEAN SME Academy is used to increase knowledge and skills of ASEAN small business owners (Photo: Nathan Associates)



COVID-19 has impacted numerous ASEAN small business owners (Photo: Deborah Tomasowa, IGNITE Project Nathan Associates)

Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19

To support ASEAN SMEs' economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19, USAID will update and transform the Academy in partnership with the US-ASEAN Business Council, leveraging a 1:1 match in private sector funds for the platform renewal. The renewed Academy will include a dedicated COVID-19 section featuring relevant courses, webinars, and other resources to help businesses adapt and thrive throughout the pandemic.

A Renewed Resource for SMEs

The modernized platform for the ASEAN SME Academy will provide rich, inclusive and engaging learning opportunities for ASEAN SMEs. The new website will be scalable, usable, content-rich, and accessible across key regional languages and serve as a valuable tool for businesses. Through enrollment in the new content and use of the new resources, SMEs across the region will increase their knowledge and skills and in turn, be better positioned to manage cash flows, increase their revenues, and harness digital technologies for growth.

In supporting this initiative, USAID promotes prosperity and economic stability, ultimately securing the future of U.S. economic and business interests in the ASEAN region.

HIGHLIGHTED RESULTS

The SME Academy exemplifies a successful partnership between the United States, ASEAN, and the U.S. private sector. For over six years, SMEs across ASEAN have benefited from online access to courses and resources on marketing, finance, human resources, management, trade and logistics, operations, and technology from more than 14 leading U.S. companies. Highlighted results include:

- Attracts more than 9,850 registered users and about 472,000 visitors
- Facilitates access to skills and resources for SMEs in all 10 ASEAN member states and across 15 sectors
- Harnessed private sector partnerships to develop 95 courses and 375 additional online resources
- Supports women-owned businesses (42% of users are female)



A participant during a training on how to best utilize the ASEAN SME Academy platform (Photo: Deborah Tomasowa, IGNITE Project Nathan Associates)

There are numerous examples of entrepreneurs using the SME Academy to propel their businesses to success, such as those in Lombok's textile industry. **Fathiati Martini of Lombok, Indonesia noted: "I am convinced that the Academy's Online Marketing course can help me learn how to sell more and the women weavers can make a better living and promote our beautiful fabrics."**

This work is a critical part of ASEAN's response to and recovery from COVID-19. The United States remains committed to the economic growth and prosperity of the region.

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